

Two Year Workplan 2015-2016

The mission of the Sonoma RCD is to help agricultural and rural landowners protect, conserve, and restore natural resources through information, education, and technical assistance programs.

The RCD delivers conservation programs in 4 areas-LandSmart® Planning, LandSmart On-the-Ground, LandSmart Water Resources, and LandSmart Education

Sonoma RCD Land Use Demographics: 900,000 acres, 59,772 vineyard acres (6 percent) pasture (36 percent), forests (49 percent) and urban area (9 percent)

LANDSMART™ PLANNING

VISION

LandSmart Planning will be a program that is respected by agricultural producers, agencies, and environmentalists alike. In addition to regulatory compliance outcomes, the planning process will help agricultural producers to become more knowledgeable about conservation needs and options within their operations, and will lead to real and positive change on the ground.

GOALS

- Knowledge/awareness of the program:
 - 40 – 50% of grape growers know about program (1,800 in County)
 - Increased awareness of the program among equine facilities and ranchers (2,200 parcels of pasture, amount of equine facilities unknown)
- The program is financially sustainable
- The RCD has adequate staffing to do plans, both in terms of technical capacity and volume
- A plan is accepted as compliance with the following water quality regulations

Land Use	Regulation	Status
Vineyard	General Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs), Sonoma Creek	In progress, expected adoption 2015
	WDRs or Conditional Waiver of WDRs (Waiver), North Coast Will also include orchards	On hold, expected adoption after other permits in region (Tule Lake, Lily Bulb production) are complete
Rangeland	Waiver, Sonoma Creek	In place
	WDRs or Waiver, State-wide	In progress, expected adoption 2016
Equine	WDRs, San Francisco Bay region, will apply at first only in TMDL watersheds	In progress, expected adoption 2015

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	(Sonoma Creek)	
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➤ Plan completion goals:

Land Use	Geographic Focus	Number of Plans by the end of 2016
Vineyard	Sonoma Creek, Dry Creek, Laguna/Mark West	50
Rangeland	Laguna/Mark West, Maacama Creek, Sonoma Creek	15
Equine	Laguna/Mark West	15

- By the end of 2016, identify a total of at least 160 on-farm BMPs from implementation by the landowner independently or with the help of the RCD.
- In 2015-2016, begin work to identify and fund 1 demonstration site in each of the following areas, to be implemented by the end of 2018. Demonstration sites would include multiple practices at a site that is easily accessible for field days.

Land Use	Geographic Focus for Demonstration Sites
Vineyard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sonoma Creek – Dry Creek Valley – Laguna/Mark West
Rangeland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Laguna/Mark West – Maacama Creek – Sonoma Creek
Equine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Laguna/Mark West

- Program expansion/feasibility assessment:
- Develop complete data (including mapping) on number and location of rangeland properties in district
 - Assess demand for planning services and feasibility of providing those services for:
 - Rangeland properties in the Petaluma River and Stemple Creek watersheds
 - Equine properties throughout the district
 - Add Carbon Farm Planning element to LandSmart Plan templates and begin completing these plans in order to develop on-the-ground trials and/or demonstrations
- Complete and disseminate Watershed-wide Management/Enhancement Plans for Maacama/Mark West Creeks (integrated plan), Petaluma River and Sonoma Creek.
- Complete development of a Water Quality Credit Trading framework for the Laguna de Santa Rosa where point-source dischargers can purchase water quality offset credits generated by non-point source pollution reduction projects.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

MESSAGING

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- Recognize who our competition is, what are our comparative strengths, and how we can market those strengths. Determine if the Landsmart planning for vineyards is needed, and desired, by grape grower and if not, de-emphasize the program.
- Tell the story of what's in it for the producer:
 - Regulatory compliance
 - Future reduced maintenance costs
 - Marketing potential
 - Animal health (equine)
 - Improved pasture productivity, soil health (rangeland)

OUTREACH

Outreach strategy as defined is staff-level documents

FUNDING NEEDS

- The RCD needs to raise an additional \$53,000 to fund all proposed activity for 2015
- The RCD needs to raise an additional \$80,000 to fund all proposed activity in 2016

FUNDRAISING

	Dry Creek	Laguna/ Mark West	Maacama Creek	Petaluma River	Sonoma Creek	Stemple Creek
Vineyard	Russian River fisheries-related funding 319(h) potential in future with vineyard WDRs/Waiver		N/A	N/A	EPA 319(h)	N/A
	District-Wide Specialty Crop Block Grants, Climate-related grants, NRCS Contribution Agreements, Integrated Regional Water Management Planning (IRWMP), Fee for service					
Rangeland	N/A	Russian River fisheries-related funding 319(h) potential in future with grazing WDRs/Waiver		As part of District-wide	EPA 319(h)	319(h)
	District-Wide Climate-related grants, NRCS Contribution Agreements, Integrated Regional Water Management Planning (IRWMP), Fee for service					
Equine	N/A	319(h)	N/A	As part of district-wide	EPA 319(h)	N/A
	District-Wide Integrated Regional Water Management Planning (IRWMP), Fee for service					

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BOARD SUPPORT NEEDED

- Vineyard – provide feedback on program development and delivery. Outreach directly to leaders in the vineyard community regarding the program.
- Rangeland – provide feedback on program development and delivery. Help identify leaders in the rancher/rangeland community for outreach.
- Equine – help assess need, feasibility, and funding potential.

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SWOT ANALYSIS



STRENGTHS

All land uses

- The RCD has long-standing relationships with a variety of stakeholders
- RCD regional RCDs partnerships within the LandSmart program

Vineyard

- LandSmart has been built with the participation of regulators, anticipating the specific requirements of pending regulations

Rangeland

- LandSmart plans can add value beyond what some producers have already done

WEAKNESSES

All land uses

- Still perfecting the planning process and materials – it has been an iterative process, and this has made completing plans slow
- We are not marketing experts
- Vineyard-competing programs and limited landowner participation may lead to low program success

Equine

- The RCD does not have as many long-term relationships in the equine community as it does with other land uses

OPPORTUNITIES

All land uses

- Pending water quality regulations create potential demand

Vineyards

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- The grape growing community is relatively well-organized, easier to reach than other land uses

Equine

- This land use is traditionally under-served by conservation programs, leaving an open niche

THREATS

All land uses

- Variable nature of grant funding

Vineyard

- Fish Friendly Farming – funding and participant competition
- Ag Commissioner –If VESCO+ becomes an alternative for WDR compliance there may be little need for a LandSmart for Vineyards program
- The Code – Winegrape Commission efforts may never adequately integrate LandSmart

Rangeland

- Fish Friendly Ranching – funding competition

Equine

- Outreach may be difficult with such a closed community

LANDSMART™ ON-THE-GROUND

VISION

LandSmart On-the-Ground will implement high priority projects derived from LandSmart farm and ranch plan or high priority projects on rural lands. Projects will be directed to achieve multiple benefits, both to the landowner and to natural resources such as water quality, water quantity, fish and wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration. Participating landowners will be engaged and become future ambassadors of the RCD and its work.

GOALS

- Complete a County-wide Mitigated Negative Declaration for on the ground projects delivered through the district's conservation programs.
- Cooperate with at least 5 dairy producers in the Laguna de Santa Rosa watershed to complete projects that benefit both water quality and dairy production.
- Determine feasibility, and need for, a Southern Sonoma Watersheds Dairy and Ranches Program –Petaluma, Stemple, Sonoma Creek watersheds
- Identify and implement 4-6 highpriority habitat improvement projects in priority watersheds including Maacama, Mark West, Dry Creek, Mill Creek, Middle Russian, Austin Creek, Russian Gulch, Sheephouse Creek, Sonoma Creek, and Petaluma River.
- Continue overseeing the Levee maintenance program in Southern Sonoma Creek and Petaluma River Watersheds.
- Complete the Austin Creeks Roads Project (\$1 million dollar project)
- Complete 25-35 water quality and carbon sequestration BMPS on farms and ranches.
- Identify and pursue funding for fuel load reduction projects on forestlands in Coastal Watersheds.
- Determine feasibility of a coordination permitting program on forestlands for habitat enhancement and erosion control work.
- Determine feasibility of continuing to implement sediment reduction projects on rural roads (105 miles of road assessed, 12 miles received implementation funding) given little funding available from funding agencies for these projects.

FUNDING NEEDS

\$325,000 for known project construction costs and development of new projects and programs. known)

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The rest of our funding needs are undetermined at this point as they are dependent on what types of projects are developed and how much they cost.

LANDSMART™ WATER RESOURCES

VISION

The Water Resources Program assists rural landowners, land managers and agriculturists to improve their water supply management, resiliency, use efficiency, and conservation. The program will deliver multi-benefit projects that deliver positive outcomes for landowners, the public, fish, and wildlife, while addressing climate change and adaptation needs, and promoting projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions through increased energy efficiency.

GOALS

1) Water Resources Program Development

- A. In the next two years the Sonoma RCD will become the “go to” hub for technical assistance on water management, use efficiency, supply resiliency and conservation for rural landowners and agriculturists in our district. A Water Conservation Hotline will be available to rural and agricultural landowners that:
 - Provides consultation in the field, over the phone, and online.
 - Supplies landowners with information and resources for their water conservation needs
- B. Identify existing information sources and data gaps. Conduct a program needs assessment. Develop and maintain information/resources for sharing. Develop and maintain current consultant and contractor lists.
- C. Maintain and develop staffing and knowledge base to meet needs of the program.
- D. Increase the visibility of our program and number of people participating.
- E. Investigate feasibility of implementing a water conservation rebate program.

2) Water Management Assessment Program

- A. Vineyards: Conduct irrigation evaluations to assess distribution uniformity (DU) and system performance. Conduct roughly 25 evaluations each year.
- B. Range, Dairy and Row Crops: Assist landowners, land managers and agriculturists to evaluate their water systems/management, and make improvements. Work with 2 operations per year.

3) Alternative Water Source Development Projects

- A. Develop, design and implement 3-5 projects each year that augment water supply and protect creek flows in the districts’ high priority geographic areas (1-3 in Design/Planning phase, 1-3 in implementation phase). Projects include tanks, ponds, and developing frost protection alternatives. Identify potential demonstration sites in our high priority geographic areas: Sonoma Creek, Petaluma watershed, Laguna watershed, and select tributaries of the Russian River.

4) Groundwater Management

- A. Conduct well level monitoring for CASGEM and the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria. Conclude the Graton Monitoring Program in Winter of 2015.
- B. Participate in Sonoma Creek, Laguna watershed, and emerging Petaluma watershed groundwater management planning efforts led by the Sonoma County Water Agency.

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- C. Develop 1-2 water infiltration and recharge projects each year that slow, spread, and infiltrate water, and ideally provide floodwater management benefits

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

MESSAGING

- Increase marketing and outreach efforts to make more people aware of the RCD's capacity to assist rural land owners, managers and agriculturists
- Communicate the quantitative, qualitative, and financial benefits and growing need for improved water management and supply resiliency to respond to growing population, increased demand, prolonged droughts, and climate change
- Develop and share message that good water management and increased resiliency simultaneously protects resources, saves money, and increases security

OUTREACH

Outreach strategy as defined is staff-level documents

FUNDING NEEDS

- The RCD needs to raise an additional \$76,000 to fund all proposed activity for 2015
- The RCD needs to raise an additional \$104,000 to fund all proposed activity in 2016
- On the ground project costs 2015/2016 estimated: \$900,000

FUNDRAISING

	Water Resources Program Development	Water Management Assessment Program	Alternative Water Source Development Projects	Groundwater Management
California Department of Fish and Wildlife			X	
California Department of Water Resources	X	X	X	X
California Energy Commission		X		
California Public Utilities Commission		X		
Integrated Regional Water Management Plan			X	X
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation			X	
National Oceanic and Atmospheric			X	

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Administration				
Natural Resources Conservation Service EQIP Program			X	
Pacific Gas and Electric		X		
Sonoma County Water Agency	X	X	X	X
Sonoma County Community Foundation	X	X	X	X

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- The RCD has long-standing relationships with a variety of landowners and stakeholders
- The RCD is uniquely positioned to do outreach, education and offer technical assistance to landowners, land managers, and agriculturists- in a non-regulatory capacity
- The RCD is in a favorable position to receive grant funding and implement programs and projects
- RCD staff possess a distinctive set of skills and experience to execute projects
- Through release of Slow It, Spread It, Sink It, the RCD has established itself as a primary source of information on water infiltration and recharge, which has considerable water conservation potential
- The Sonoma RCD's past and present work puts us in a strong position to be a primary resource for water management technical assistance, as well as participate in regional initiatives and influence water policy in the district
- An active irrigation evaluation program introduces us to people that want to move forward with improvements and other impactful water conserving projects

WEAKNESSES

- The RCD has a limited budget and staffing capacity to run programs and assist landowners with projects
- The integrity and longevity of programs may be at risk over time due to grant funding cycles and unpredictability
- Conducting irrigation evaluations, offering technical assistance, and providing education provides no guarantee that growers will implement measures and use less water

OPPORTUNITIES

- Our District's tendency towards extended dry periods, intense rain events, and climate change creates a constant need to assist people to manage their water resources
- Water catchment is a an emerging field with relatively few skilled professionals planning and implementing projects and programs
- No other group or consultant currently fills this essential niche in a comprehensive way

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THREATS

- In an increasingly regulated environment, many people may resist working with the RCD because they view it as a government agency, or as an entity to monitor their resource use behavior
- Some people will be reluctant to work with the RCD because water is such a highly politicized issue, which is further exaggerated by our current state of extreme drought
- Water catchment projects may require lengthy forbearance agreements that may discourage landowner participation
- The Water Agency may be interested in implementation projects that have traditionally been the domain of the RCD
- A return to a wetter winter weather pattern may diminish interest
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LANDSMART™ EDUCATION

VISION

Programming will be offered to the community and our constituents to engage with cutting edge conservation and stewardship techniques on Sonoma County's working landscapes to create connections and inspire natural resource conservation. RCD will create greater partnerships with other local groups to leverage resources and accelerate our mission of conservation on the ground, and avoid duplication of efforts.

GOALS/INDICATORS

- 1) Increased Awareness of RCD programs, leverage partnerships to achieve conservation goals
 - Number of constituents being reached about the RCD and our programs will be assessed. Staff will work with a strategy with a consultant to define strategies to increase awareness with a goal of a 50% increase in the number of people receiving our e-news.
 - Expand partnerships and utilizations of partner organization resources through watershed forums and partnership meetings.
 - 2) Education for Youth
 - By the end of 2016, we will complete:
 - 14 FARMS Leadership field days
 - A minimum of 10 TEAM days in our district on lands protected by conservation easements from SCAPOSD
 - 3) Education for Agriculturalists and Rural Landowners
 - The RCD will offer two, high impact and well attended LandSmart™ Workshops annually relating to sustainable agricultural, farm and ranch planning, water quality, water conservation and other natural resources issues on rangelands, equine facilities, livestock, vineyards, and rural lands.
 - 4) Education for Greater Public
 - 10 well-attended Agricultural Heritage Series public outings completed on lands protected by conservation easements from SCAPOSD, focus on increasing attendance and reducing cost per outing.
 - Tabling events-Attendance at 6 highly attended community events annually.
 - Update of RCD Publications: Key RCD publications will be updated and re-distributed via email.
 - 70th Anniversary Event (2016)
 - Complete History of the Baylands and RCD 70th Years of Sonoma RCD Videos.
 - Send out Success Stories mailer to all farms and ranches (5,100) in district to expand awareness of the RCD and its programs.
- B. Continue the Value of Working Lands project with SCAPOSD.

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STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

OUTREACH

Outreach strategy as defined is staff-level documents

FUNDING NEEDS

- \$74,000-All for Tasks in Greater Public Education, all other funding is secured.

FUNDRAISING

- Foundations, County Funding, Property Taxes

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- The RCD has long-standing relationships with a variety of stakeholders.
- The FARMS Leadership Program is a long-running program of the district, and is well-known among existing participant schools and landowners, and has secure funding
- LandSmart™ workshops speak directly to current/pending regulatory requirements and other practical land management considerations.
- RCD regional partnerships that has been formed with the LandSmart™ program.

WEAKNESSES

- The RCD continues to be challenged by the amount of other groups doing similar work and duplicating efforts, there is still a substantial lack of coordination in Sonoma County among groups doing conservation work.
- Our reach for publicizing Agricultural Heritage outings is limited in comparison to other outings programs and our costs are higher than those of others organizations that provide outings on Open Space lands.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Agricultural and environmental education linkage in a county where agricultural sector is still the largest driving force in the local economy.
- Common Core standards for schools.

THREATS

- Other service providers who may compete with our programming specifically in offering public outing opportunities on agricultural lands.

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- Other organizations that host workshops comparable to LandSmart™ Workshops can compete for funding and participants (if there is not adequate communication regarding how workshop offerings overlap).
- Number of agricultural properties with easements that are appropriate for outings is limited.

BOARD SUPPORT NEEDED

Outreach and Education represents an area of growth needed by the board. With staff raising all funds and delivering all programs there is a limit to how much partnership building and RCD advocacy we can do on limited budgets. Staff recommends that the Fund Development committee be re-engaged as the External Relations committee and they work with staff to develop and implement strategies to build better partnerships throughout the County to further the RCD's conservation goals. RCD needs its own project planning money so it does not lose its autonomy and voice about local conservation priorities.

Board members must have the time to commit to understanding the RCD's broad spectrum of work on every land use in the district.

Forestland representation is needed on the board to further the goals of that landuse, largest in the district.

STAFFING PLAN

There is not an increase in staffing plan planned for the next year workplan with the exception of an Education program intern and a seasonal field technician for the Irrigation Evaluation program. There has been a decline in the contracts the RCD has but we have a solid staff of 12 with adequate technical and administrative staff to carry out the 2 year workplan. The limiting factor to success will be the ability to raise additional funds in several program areas to achieve the goals set forth.